A Tale of Old Victoria

By J. K. NESBITT

THE OLD OMNIBUS

The last streetcar was the No. 3—Beacon Hill—which made its final run July 4, 1948. Then came the buses we know today, and gradually the streetcar tracks were ripped up.

It was about 1900 when the first automobiles came to Victoria and Vancouver.

Dr. E. C. Hart was one of the first car owners in Victoria. In 1903 he startled the town. An account of his trip follows: "When called to the scene of the accident at Macaulay Point on Friday, Dr. Hart made an unusually quick run from his residence on the Cadboro Bay Road. The distance is about four or five miles, and was covered in 17 minutes. The run to Point Ellice bridge from the house was made in seven minutes. A minute was lost on the bridge and 10 minutes were consumed in making the remainder of the distance, owing to bad roads."

Then came a steam car: "The steam automobile imported by Mr. Todd was the cynosure of all eyes as it noiselessly coursed through the various thoroughfares of the city. Steam has many advantages over all other modes of propelling automobiles, among them being easy running, facility of management, absence of vibration and of odor, and elasticity of power. It seems now the horseless carriage is likely to come into general use. It is found to be perfectly manageable and can be used in large cities where the traffic is very great."

Soon there were so many automobiles roaring about the streets of British Columbia cities that councils had to bring in traffic laws.

One introduced in Victoria said: "In the principle thoroughfares of the city the rate of speed of motor vehicles shall not be more than six miles an hour, and at corners or sharp turns the speed must be reduced to three miles an hour, and when at a distance of 20 yards from a corner the driver shall sound two blasts of the horn, whistle, bell, or other sound-making contrivance."

Then there was so much noise, another law became necessary: "No alarm, bell, gong, horn or whistle shall be used in a noisy or offensive manner, or without reasonable occasion, or as to cause material annoynace to the residents of the city."

By 1905 people were actually driving up-Island. Then came the first ferry trip for an automobile, from Nanaimo to Vancouver:

"Capt. J. W. Troup didn't hesitate—and sailed merrily down and up, and onto the narrow deck of the Joan with a precision that was admirable—the space left for Mr. D. R. Ker's machine was too small to permit of any manoeuvring on the deck and he wisely decided to put her on by hand, and it was quite interesting to observe the Honorables Capt. Tatlow and Col. Prior, with all the high types of the C.P.R., the greatest transcontinental railway in the world, grunting like navvies while they pushed that monster machine of Mr. Ker's on deck."

When Sir Alexander Campbell came to Victoria in 1883, the minister of justice was driven about in the lieutenant-governor's carriage, pictured here.

The bicycle craze hit British Columbia in the early 1890's. So many people had bicycles that street railway officials said they jeopardized streetcar service.

A sensation was caused in 1896 when a pair of Nanaimo newly-weds, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Charlton, made a honeymoon cycle trip from Nanaimo to Victoria and back.

The Nanaimo Free Press told the story under the heading. "A Honeymoon Awheel."

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Charlton introduced the bicycle wedding to British Columbia — the bride's further distinction of being first of her sex over tht Victoria road.

"It was during the wedding breakfast that the bride astonished such of her friends as were not in on the secret by informing them of her intention to enjoy her honeymoon awheel, she and her husband having decided to make the trip to Victoria, even if it took them days to accomplish.

"The smart wedding gown of ashes of roses, with trimming of brown velvet, was soon exchanged for a bicycling suit of navy blue. Mr. and Mrs. Charlton mounted their bicycles and whirled away from the parting congratulations of their assembled friends.

"The first state of the journey as man and wife was over the smoothest and best roads, and all went well and happily.

"Night came on, finding the cyclists out of sight of human habitation, but even this did not in the least disconcert them. A rude camp in the forest offered accommodations that were voted quite satisfactory, and at daybreak the journey was resumed.

"The most trying portion of the trip was the crossing of 'The Summit,' a section of the trip which even hardy male riders have usually avoided by taking the train between Shawnigan and Goldstream. This Mr. and Mrs. Charlton scorned to do, and when they pedalled into Victoria in the afternoon no one would have judged from their appearance that they had wheeled further than from Goldstream."

The Charlton honeymoon trip encouraged the cyclists to speed and daring, and the city council had to bring in traffic by-laws for bicycles.

An editorial commented:

"His Worship Mayor Redfern is entitled to the thanks of all classes of citizens for instructing the police that no more scorching is to be permitted in Beacon Hill Park, whether that scorching be done in a bicycle ace or only to the danger and discomfort of the everyday crowd in the park. Such action is well timed, and commends itself to everyone of common sense."

The funeral cortege in the days of the horse-drawn vehicle was an impressive and awesome thing, especially when soldiers or bluejackets marched in procession.

'OLD BOB' BOXED HERE

By STIRLING P. HANNA

AT WOOD & TODD'S blacksmith shop at Broad and Pandora, a crowd was watching a large man hammering out a red hot horseshoe.

"Who is that man?"

"That man? Why that's Ruby Robert — Bob Fitzsimmons to you, my lad. You can see him at Pantages Theatre."

Later, with money in my pocket, I arrived at the Pantages eager to see the ex-heavyweight champion of the world.

The curtain rose, a huge man dressed in new blue overalls walked to the centre of the stage, set on the floor his round tin dinner pail, and burst into song.

"It's the man with the hod, pick and shovel,

"It's the man in the blue overalls . . ..." and so on, to loud applause.

Then the curtain rose revealing a lady who had lost her way in the big city. A large man approaches touching his cap.

"Bob Fitzsimmons, at your service, ma'am."

"I am afraid I have lost my way."

"Let me take you home."

"Oh, I couldn't go with you. Aren't you the prizefighter?"

"I am, and you will be as safe in my care as in your father's house." (Applause).

"It is very kind of you, I am sure." And the falling curtain reveals Bob escorting the lady on her way.

In the next act we saw the mighty Bob in fighting trunks boxing his son, Young Bob. The son was tall, good-looking and a fine figure of a man, but he had never had to work hard like his blacksmith father.

They touched gloves and then boxed beautifully, but at the end it was Old Bob who was breathing hard.

In the last act Bob appeared alone behind a punching-bag. From the floor to his hips Bob was built like a mile runner, but from his hips to his ears he was built like — well, a blacksmith. His hair was reddish, his hands enormous, and his arms were very long and covered with large freckles.

With feet well apart, knees at times propped against each other, Bob pounded and thunderd that punching-bag until the whole theatre seemed to vibrate. Then he slowed down, let the bag rebound softly, then suddenly struck a terrific blow. The rope burst, the bag flew out over the audience to wild applause.

Old Bob smiled at the mighty power of his knockout punch, bowed to great applause, and bowed again. The applause continued, so Bob bowed once more, and lower still. As he rose, his bald head gleamed in the bright lights, and on his enormous outstretched hand lay his red toupee!

Laughter, tremendous applause, curtain!